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British doctor aides servicemember's surgery

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Enjoying an afternoon motorcycle ride in England can end your career in the blink of an eye or the slip of a back tire. Tech. Sgt. Kevin Gunter, 100th Logistics Readiness Squadron chief of personal property, found himself in this situation in October.

Thanks to the guidance of a British surgeon and the skill of surgeons at the base hospital, Sergeant Gunter's future has a more positive outlook.

Sergeant Gunter lost control of his motorcycle when the back tire slipped out from under him, toppling the bike and crushing his wrist.

Following treatment at a British local hospital, Sergeant Gunter reported to the base hospital where he was placed in the care of Lt. Col. (Dr.) Jeffrey Marchessault, 48th Medical Operations Squadron staff orthopedic surgeon.

Sergeant Gunter suffered from a fractured dislocated wrist, bones in his wrist were broken into several pieces and his wrist was severely out of joint, said Colonel Marchessault.

"Kevin's wrist was worse than Humpty Dumpty," he said. Due to the extent of his injury, surgical options were limited.

Colonel Marchessault turned to his military and civilian colleagues at a surgical seminar in Florida for treatment options. After meeting with other professionals in the orthopedic surgical field, the doctor was able to offer Sergeant Gunter an alternative operation - fusing his wrist with a metal plate. The procedure would relieve the pain; however, it would leave the wrist immobile or with limited movement and strength. Colonel Marchessault's alternative operation involved replacing the crushed bone, which would restore the most strength and mobility to his wrist and increase Sergeant Gunter's odds of returning to his 16-year active duty career.

"Once I had all the information, it was an easy choice for me," said Sergeant Gunter.

He chose the option to return as much strength and mobility to his wrist as possible and hopefully allow him to continue his career.

The decision was to either send Sergeant Gunter to the United States for the surgery or to perform it here.

Alternatively, Dr. Murray Mathewson, a local specialist, was asked as a personal favor to come in as a consultant on the surgery.

Dr. Mathewson may not have been the one actually holding the scalpel but his input and trained eyes were invaluable to the surgery. He brought decades of experience to the case. The surgery went very well and it was all due to Dr. Mathewson, said Colonel Marchessault.

After the surgery, Dr. Mathewson did not ask for any money. He had donated his time and knowledge to help the military and Sergeant Gunter.

"Dr. Mathewson's expertise allowed us to do the surgery here and save the Air Force thousands of dollars," said Lt. Col. (Dr.) Michael Miller, chief orthopedic surgery deputy, chief medical staff. Allowing Sergeant Gunter to receive follow-up care where the surgery was performed is obviously better, he added.

Sergeant Gunter still has a long road to recovery left, but with the help of a British doctor and the skill of the RAF Lakenheath orthopedic surgeons, he has a better outlook for recovery.

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48th Fighter Wing Public Affairs